

Drunken Monologue From An Alcoholic Father's Oldest Daughter

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My friends say I should have been a therapist and it ain't funny no more. I ain't seen a dollar of pay for this labor, all my pretending—who do I see about my check? My father says *I just need somebody to talk to* when he calls. He's sitting in our house alone looking at old pictures and drinking. *I still love my wife, I still love my wife*. And if I answer the phone, I gotta be the mother

he missed out on as a kid. I pick up and I gotta turn on a mother's softness. But I ain't gave birth to nothing. Never felt that funny feeling of my second self latching on to the first. How do you love something that looks right through you? You gotta pretend, act like you understand. My father says *I spent Christmas alone for the first time in my life* and man I swear somebody

needs to give me an Oscar for the way I sounded like somebody's momma. Said *God gon' work it out*. But I know my mother did the right thing. Left him. My brother and sister were alone with him for hours while she was gone, and I, you know, I just felt funny about it. And the way my father would call me pretending he was the victim when I knew what it really was. Maybe we all loved

the chaos a little bit, having a place to put the blame. Maybe I loved the way they needed me. But I ain't love the pressure. Somebody told me that I was the glue that held it all together. Now I gotta pretend that's a compliment, I gotta "ha-ha" and "he-he" when they call me "mother 2.0." I laugh and say *I don't even need kids anymore* but what's so funny about that, a hatred that spreads to the womb? I've had a lot of alone

time to wonder about the choices my father makes. Being alone over rehab, over family. Sometimes I say *that motherfucker don't love me* to myself in the mirror real tough. And I keep saying it until it's funny, until I'm laughing and then I'm crying and then I sound like somebody dying when I start coughing from both. Sometimes I ask my mother what happened to him and she just says *it's sad*. Most times, I pretend

I feel the same and I "mhm" on the phone but this time I can't pretend no more. I say *momma I know you feel bad for leaving him alone but it was the right thing to do*. I say *you did what any mother would have done*. I say *the kids know you did it out of love, to protect them*. She silent, so I say *momma he could have killed somebody* and she says *hardy-har-har, real funny*. But just how funny

if we ain't laughing? I want to say something in the silence, something funny, but I know my mother wants to be left alone when she pretends to yawn. So I tell her I love her. And I don't remember who hangs up. Somebody.